

1Max Stewart

Tapes 331-332

Interviewed by Kathleen Irving, 22 November 2002

Transcribed by Kathleen Irving, November 2002

Kathleen Irving (KI): Today is 22 November 2002. I am with Max Stewart at his home at 240 South 200 W. Max, would you like to tell me where you were born and about your family when you were growing up?

Max Stewart (Max): Sure. I was born at Jensen in 1929 on March 8. Now you want my parents?

KI: Yes, I'd love to have your parents' names.

Max: Well, I'm the son of Guy Ramsey Stewart and Amanda Hatch Stewart.

KI: Who were your mother's parents? Which Hatches?

Max: Her mother was Zinni Nickels Hatch and her father was Jeremiah Ricey Hatch. I think that's pretty close. Anyway, I have some half-brothers. Father had married before and his first wife died. My half-brothers are Guy Fritz and Glen Stewart. Glen is deceased and so is Fritz. Then I have a brother Dale, as you know, and a sister named Lora.

KI: Were you born right in Jensen? Did a doctor come to your mother or a midwife?

Max: Yes. Back in those days you were born pretty much where you lived. I think a doctor did come down. I think he was called for and he did come down. I think it could have been Dr. Francke, or Franks, I'm not sure. It was a muddy, wet spring and when my brother came home from school, and he was eight years older, that's Dale, my mother asked, "What do you think I've got under the blanket here in bed with me?" And Dale said, "A duck?" Because there were so many ducks down there. I was born on the edge of Stewart's Lake.

KI: He was surprised to have a brother instead, huh?

Max: Yeah, he was pretty shocked when it turned out to be me. I was probably the ugly duckling at the time there.

KI: So, you said you were born on the edge of Stewart's Lake. Those Stewarts were your family?

Max: Yes. We lived on the ranch. I don't know who owns it now, I think the Snows, but back then we called it Longview Ranch. I think it was financed by my Aunt May Johnson, who was very wealthy. She married a guy and she didn't know he was wealthy. He came out and homesteaded for a couple of years and acted like he was dirt poor. One day he went to town and bought a pair of patent leather shoes, which was one of the biggest luxuries. I mean, there was no

place to wear them in those days. They didn't even have a lawn, it was just dirt. If you came to town, town was pretty rough, too. So, she kind of felt bad about that, about the extravagance of the gift.

KI: He bought her a pair of patent leather shoes?

Max: Yeah, her husband. He just picked her up and dumped her feet first into a slop bucket. You know, outside the door they always had a bucket. They didn't waste anything. He dumped her into the slop bucket and she cried and thought he'd gone mad. But it was just his way of letting her know that he was very wealthy and that he'd just come out west to find a wife that loved him, and not his money. So, Johnson and Johnson baby products is one of their holdings. He owned land all over, Twenty-Nine Palms, and on the St. Lawrence River he owned an island. Anyway, they went back to New York.

At that time she financed her brothers on ranches. Have you heard of Blake Peterson? The ranch that he had, he's deceased, that was William Oakley's place, and Bill's wife was my aunt D.S.T., her father's sister.

KI: What was her name?

Max: D.S.T.

KI: Do you want to spell it for me?

Max: D dot, S dot, T dot. They got drunk one night when they were trying to figure out a name for their child, so they decided to put all the letters from the alphabet into a hat and they'd draw out three and whichever they drew out, that would be the child's name, and the letters were D, S, T.

KI: So, Dee-es-ty sounds okay for a name, doesn't it, if you say it like that.

Max: Yeah. Everyone called her Aunt Des, you know, anyway, all the folks down there. Lloyd Stewart had a ranch and my father had one and my Uncle Lute had one that she financed. I wasn't around too much in those days, but I don't think we were very popular at Jensen. This was during the Depression, and gosh, we had a nice home with electric lights. We had a Delco system.

KI: A Delco system? What was that?

Max: Yeah. It was a generator system with a big engine that generated electricity and we could have lights. We had running water and all that stuff.

KI: Yeah, I can see how that might make you unpopular with people who were struggling.

Max: That didn't last long for me. The folks divorced when I was in the second grade and I had that silver spoon jerked out of my mouth. I went from that place, which was a nice two-story

building, to a little two-room log cabin in Maeser with a dirt roof. But I didn't know the difference. I was just young and had fun wherever I went.

KI: Did your dad stay out on the ranch?

Max: Oh, my dad was kind of a rascal.

KI: He must have been if he didn't support you.

Max: Well, he was kind of ladies' man. I didn't learn this until later years and maybe some of my people would correct me, but I heard that when I was born he had a girlfriend in Salt Lake and he was out there. But, he was the baby of his family and everybody spoiled him rotten. My Aunt May sent him on cruises and all kinds of trips without Mother.

Pat Stewart (Pat): How long was it after that he left the ranch then?

Max: Well, after the folks divorced, it made Aunt May very angry at him, because she liked Mother, and so it was just probably a year or so after that, it was almost immediate probably. I was only eight years old, so I can't remember too well, but anyway, she withdrew her support and he had to leave the ranch. Then it was up for lease and I think Guy leased it and later on, I don't know who got it after Guy had it, but Guy only stayed there four or five years.

KI: Do you have very many memories of living on the ranch?

Max: Sure. I got real good recall.

KI: Good. Tell me about it. I have plenty of tape.

Max: Memories of living on the ranch. I could tell about that outhouse experience.

KI: Oh, do, please.

Max: Listen, we had one of the best outhouses in the country. It was four-holer. One of them was a smaller child's. You could step down for a child. But the neat thing about it, it had an automatic flush periodically. They built a flume and the waste water from the ditch would wash it out and dump the waste down into a slough. There was already a slough, so it seemed to be okay.

Well, this one day the water was coming down and sticks were floating in it, foamy, it was just getting there. I was fascinated by everything, so I was out in the outhouse, and I decided I'd get a closer look, so I stuck my head down one of the holes. It was good; I could see everything quite well. This is serious now. This is not funny. Everybody always laughs. But I got trapped, I couldn't get my head out. I was stuck there. So, I yelled for help, like a young kid would. I was probably six or seven. My brother finally heard me, this was Dale, and he came in. He looked the situation over and he said, "Max, you're just going to have to stay there the rest of your life. We'll just have to hand the food down through this other hole over here."

KI: He must have been about 14 at the time or something? He was leading along this poor little boy.

Max: Yeah. Of course, that didn't encourage me very much. I kind of panicked over that. Then here finally Mother came. She was out by the outhouse, so she heard the commotion or Dale told her, I don't remember which, I was too distraught to know that part of it. So, she came and she grabbed me by the shoulders, kind of, and tried to pull me out that way. Of course, my chin locked up underneath the ledge there and it really hurt. So, she said, "Oh dear, I guess I'll have to go get the ax and we'll just chop you out." You know, I knew my life was over at that point because I'd seen my mother chop wood and she couldn't chop worth a damn. So, Dale had gotten the ax and brought it in. Then she got thinking. She says, "Well, if you got your head in, you ought to be able to get it out." So, finally she took my chin down next to my chest and it came out okay. So I lived.

Pat: This is our family's favorite story. They always want to hear this story. They think it's the funniest story.

Max: I used to spend hours out the rushes. Going around the blackbird nests and wading around in there. I'd come in, mud up to my thighs. It was a great time.

KI: Did they ever use Stewart's Lake for recreation? It wasn't like Green's Lake or Burton's Lake, was it?

Max: Well, it was around the levy edges.

Pat: Not enough to put a boat in or anything, was it? Not a motor boat or something like that.

Max: No, nothing like that. They'd put these flat-bottomed waterfowl hunting boats in there, I guess. But, as I understand it, the reason they named it Stewart's Lake, when they acquired the property, when the state did, there were more Stewarts that owned the property than Moons or Ainges or Merkleys or the other people around there, so since the majority of owners were Stewarts, they named it Stewart's Lake. Boy, was it a paradise for a young boy. It was seven square miles of good ice skating in the winter and fishing in the spring, summer and fall.

Pat: Even when our kids were growing up, and I, as a teenager, went down there and skated. It was the best skating area in the whole area around here and everyone used it as a skating place. It was a lot of big area. Our kids came along and we took them down there skating. It was really nice. I don't think they do anything down there now at all, do they? It's all filled up with rushes and stuff. But it was wonderful.

Max: It's filled up a lot. If you ever drive down there around that levy, just envision that the water went right up to the edge of the road, just underneath it. It didn't have a lot of weeds or rushes back then. There was some out in the middle, rushes and muskrat dens and so on. They had a spillway, that was the lower drain, and they adjusted the level of the water by putting boards in and making the water back up. But it was great catfishing. We went down there often.

KI: What kind of fish did you catch?

Max: Well, out of lake itself, it was mainly just bullhead catfish. But I'd go down to the river. You read that story I wrote, didn't you, about going down just beyond that, toward the river and catching roundtail and humpies and whitefish? They call them pikeminnows now and I don't know what they were called then.

KI: Squawfish, Colorado squawfish.

Max: I don't know what they'll call them next.

Pat: Tell about you and Gene skating, down there, how you'd skate all day. How many miles around was it?

Max: Okay. It was seven square miles of skating. Gene Stewart and I did a couple of things. Sometimes they'd drop us off at Ashley Creek, where the highway crosses Ashley Creek, and we'd skate down that to the lake and then all around the lake. Then we'd get on the Green River and skate on up to my Aunt D.S.T.'s place and there'd be someone there just before dark and pick us up. But Gene and I would go down there.

KI: Who was Gene?

Max: My first double cousin. We would get up and get our chores done on a weekend whenever the folks would let us and we'd go down there early in the morning, just as early as we could. We'd take a lunch and we'd skate, enjoy ourselves. By lunchtime we'd get on the sunny side of a muskrat den and have our lunch. But there would be groups of people come from town. We would join their group and skate with them and play the games they played. When they got tired and went home, why there might be another group. Anyway, we stayed there and skated with all the groups. Then, when it was getting close to chore time, we'd leave. We weren't the only ones. There were quite a few Jensen boys that did that. Gene and I skated with racer skates.

KI: Did you buy them or did you make them?

Max: We bought them.

Pat: Shoe skates, weren't they?

KI: They just fit onto your shoe?

Max: No, you put them on.

Pat: Do you know what a racer skate is?

KI: No, not really.

Pat: You've seen figure skates? Well, racer skates have a big blade that comes out so they can go really fast.

Max: They're fifteen-inch blades. When you take a stroke with them, you've got a lot of power behind you. We learned them and we were pretty good with them, too. We could outrun anyone on a pair of hockey skates. They might keep up with us for a short time, but after that... I've always thought when you see the Olympics and you see these speed skaters, I think there were a lot of kids down in Jensen that could have qualified, could have developed into a good speed skater. Heck, their skates now, they angulate or shift, you know. They've got them to where they raise up in the back and ours were just solid.

My first skates were racer skates and they were hand-me-downs. I started skating so young, I could put my whole shoe inside of that skate. Then finally, I got so I couldn't put my shoe in, so they stuffed the end with cotton. I just kept taking pieces of cotton out as the years went by and pretty quick they fit me.

Pat: We always had shoe skates, but our roller skates we had to have a key to put those on. We never had any shoe skates to roller skate. But we always had shoe [ice] skates. We're a little past from having to fasten them on with something. I don't know how they did the ice skates then, do you?

Max: Well, there were a lot of kids that had those clamp-on skates.

KI: Did they strap them up or something?

Pat: They must have strapped them on.

Max: There was a strap, then they had the clamps that went over. The soles of the shoes were not like yours. They were thin and they stuck out a ways. So, these clamps would go right over, kind of like that, and you'd screw them in and make them tight.

KI: That was the kind of roller skates I had when I was a little girl, so I know how that fit on there.

Pat: Yes, they didn't have shoe skates for a long time.

Max: The width of the runners, those clamp-ons, were really wide. They were about three or four times wider than the racer skates.

KI: You could go lots faster in your racer skates, couldn't you?

Max: Yes, and I could skate on real rough ice easily, you know, where it was kind of ripply.

KI: Would the ripply ice happen more on the Green River than it would on the lake?

Max: No. It just depends.

Pat. Depends on the wind; the wind might cause it.

Max: Sometimes you'd get a wet snow on the good ice, and then it would kind of melt, and then it would freeze and be real rough.

Pat. But, boy, most of the time, if you could get there before it snowed, it was just like a sheet of glass. It was just beautiful. But after it snows, you know, then it's so good, but, boy, there was some fun skating down there. I wish had a place like that now. I don't know; maybe I wouldn't be going skating. Max probably would.

KI: You'd go out there and do it, huh, Max?

Max: I'd try, you bet. I think I could still do it.

KI: When you would go fishing and get these fish, would you just take them home, or did you have fish fries out on the riverbank?

Max: Mostly we'd take them home. I don't need to repeat those articles, if you've got them.

KI: Well, you can put them on tape. That's okay.

Max: The only time we had a fish fry is when Jerry would bring his seine and the whole family would congregate.

KI: Jerry?

Max: Jerry Hatch.

Pat: His uncle.

Max: Yeah, Uncle Jerry. I could repeat that if you want me to.

KI: It would fine if you want to repeat that because then I don't have to pull it in from another source.

Max: OK. Well, our family up around the Jensen area and Brush Creek area, they all selected a day. It was not only our family, but friends of the family. It was kind of a community thing, but our family sponsored it, on Mother's side, the Hatch side. So, after the chores were done, everybody would congregate. We would go down by the Jensen bridge and turn north and there was a big old cottonwood tree up there at that time, not too far from where the Cocklebur Wash comes in. At that time of the year there was still water in the Cocklebur Wash and so Jerry would take his seine and he'd get some men and they'd go to the mouth of this Cocklebur Wash. My

brother, Dale Stewart, and Jerry Hatch's son, Bill, they'd swim across that channel with the seine. Once they got on the other side, they'd start bringing the seine up and harvesting the fish.

Then the Gardners, I think it was Ira Gardner's boys, they were on horseback, and they'd come riding down the stream, chasing the fish back into the net. So, when they came out, that seine was full of fish and it took three or four or five men, and they strained to get the fish out without losing any of them. So, then they'd clean them and we ate everything that came out of there, even the carp. The carp was one of the kids' favorite because they didn't have any little bones. You could just pick it up and eat it and it was good. Of course, anything would be good fried in bacon grease. Of course, you may not think so.

KI: Oh, I'm sure it would.

Max: They built a big fire and I would say the fire would be as big as this room, the circumference. It would be a huge fire. Then when it burned down to coals, they put these Dutch ovens all around and cooked the fish in the Dutch ovens. We didn't have any refrigeration except for a few people who had ice houses and stored Green River ice in the winter. But anyway, it was a real fun day. Of course, the women would have brought other things to go with the fish, you know, homemade bread and vegetables, just whatever they had. It would be kind of a potluck thing. But, oh, it was really good.

Then after the meal was over, why the women, they got together and I guess they talked about local events and gossip and who was doing what with whom and what somebody had bought, and the men would get in the shade of that old cottonwood tree and they had some coffee and they'd smoke these Bull Durham cigarettes, they'd roll them up. Not all of them smoked.

KI: Do you know about how long it would take them to seine those fish out of there?

Max: It wouldn't take very long. Oh, I think the whole thing could be accomplished in a half hour.

Pat: Even with the horses and everything?

Max: Oh, yeah, they were already started down. Jerry did not believe in fishing with bait and pulling the line. He wanted it done *now*, you know. So, the minute you got that seine across there... It would probably take those guys a couple of minutes to swim across there and by the time they waded up, I think the whole operation could have been done in a half hour easy.

Pat: Tell her about the time you were a little kid and went down in a pool or something, when they were down there doing some stuff.

Max: Okay, I can do that. Pat wants me to tell about nearly drowning in the Green River. Well, the only other group up there at that time was the kids and we'd run around and run and grab a piece of fish and continue to play. They'd let us go swimming in the river. I don't know if they watched us or not.

I was just a little boy and we were up at Aunt D.S.T.'s place, up on the river, and we'd gotten into a boat and rowed across. They had wonderful sandbars over there. The river had just

gone down to where the top layers of sand were kind of dry. There was a dog named Duke, I believe. Old Duke and I were pretty good buddies. We'd play chase with each other and I'd throw sticks and the dog would get them and bring them back.

So, there was this little pool of water. It hadn't gone down yet. It was a pretty good-sized pool, it was probably from here to the end of the room. All of the water had been really shallow, you know, all the little pools like that. I'd run through some. So, old Duke went around that way and I thought, "I'll just head him off." I went right across that pool of water and it was over my head by a considerable bit.

I remember going in and looking up and I could see the top of the water. It was bright and there were bubbles. I can't remember any remorse or pain or anything, but I'd gone up and down, I guess, a time or two. Then I got jerked out of the water. Bernard Stewart's wife, Iva, had seen what was happening and she came running over and she grabbed me and got me out of the water. Man, once I got out, then I was in pain. I had to cough and spit up water. I could have drowned.

KI: Sounds like you were just about there.

Max: I must have been, but, you know, it wasn't a bad way to go.

KI: Tell me what kind of chores you used to do on the ranch.

Max: Well, I'll have to qualify that. We moved sixteen times before I got out of high school. So, it was different. When I was home, after the divorce...

KI: Do you remember doing chores before the divorce?

Max: Yes, I used to go feed the chickens. They had what they called a spring house. It had a spring of cold water that flowed into the slough and they'd built a structure around it. They'd put their milk and perishables down in there. So, I'd have to go and get those. Put them in, bring them out.

We had a pheasant blind. Father built a structure about like that table and they had straw, the threshers filled it, and then you have a tunnel in it. On the one side we'd crawl in and on the other side there were some willows, like this, straw-sprinkled. You'd take your .22. He'd feed the pheasants. There was a little cove and he'd feed the pheasants. Once in a while they'd let me go out and shoot a couple. You had to hit them in the head. They didn't want to waste any meat.

As I grew older and we moved about to all these places, one place we had chickens I fed and a cow to milk. Are you talking about evening and morning chores?

KI: Yes. Like you said, when you went skating, for example, you'd do your chores, then you'd come back just in time for evening chores.

Max: Yeah, we'd go milk the cow and pitch some hay to the livestock, at Gene's place, and feed the cow that we had. It wasn't too time-consuming, then, but later on, it was. The reason we moved around so much was that after Mother divorced, she would not accept any help from my father and I don't think he offered any. So, Lola Christensen, the school lunch program, hired

Mother to be a school lunch cook. Each year the location could be different. We moved to these places where the rent was free and the living conditions were grim.

This one place we had, I paid the rent by feeding a whole bunch of horses for, I think his name was Pete Peterson, but I'm not sure. We lived in his old log cabin with a dirt roof down in Jensen. So, I'd get up there twice a day and take the haying knife and slice off hay and then pitch it down to the horses. When I came home from school, I did the same thing again.

KI: You must have also gone to different schools all the time.

Max: Oh, yeah. I went to Jensen and Maeser. Even though I lived in Vernal for a time, we rode down to school with Bill Jacobe, he was a schoolteacher down there and probably the principal.

KI: Where?

Max: Down in Jensen. At that time we lived right where Showalter Motor Company is now, 317 W. Main. There was big, old cottonwood trees out front. It certainly has changed now. Yeah, I'd just get used to one set of friends, and have to move and make another set, then we'd move again. I didn't have any real close friends in the summertime because I'd live up with my grandmother or else down in Jensen or Maeser. We walked anywhere we went. Kids just didn't get together like they do now.

KI: What do you remember about school? Do you remember any of your teachers?

Max: Yes.

KI: Who were they?

Max: Let's see. My second grade teacher was named Stella Richards. My first grade teacher, I can't remember her very good. All I know is that she was cute. But Stella was a good teacher. She taught at Jensen. Then up in Maeser, my fourth grade teacher was Miss Madsen. My fifth grade teacher up there was Shelby Bentley. Then there was, I think, Clark Larsen and Tommy Caldwell, taught up in Maeser.

KI: That went through the sixth grade?

Max: I don't know what Maeser did. I quit going up there and was down in Jensen. I went down there through the eighth grade. There was a Mr. Wendell that taught down there and Beatrice Scofield. She was a good teacher. They all seemed to be pretty good. I didn't mind any of them.

KI: What happened after eighth grade?

Max: Well, I started riding the school bus up to Uintah High School.

KI: That would be the Uintah High School that was over here where the swimming pool is?

Max: Yes. We had two buildings. We just called them the Old Building and the New Building. I went there four years to high school.

KI: Did you have any really memorable experiences at school? Were you involved in extra activities at all?

Max: I played football. I made the main team and played left end. Six-man football. Played on a cinder field. They dumped ashes out there and it was dirt. We had a helmet that just fit over our head and just down around our ears. There was nothing out in front. All the guys that played, scrimmaged, we all had big sores, big bruises, kind of raw sores on both sides of our cheekbones because when you'd tackle or get tackled, this part of your face would drag into the dirt. You'd just get healed up and do it again. The only protection we had was thigh pads and shoulder pads.

We did quite well the year I played. We won the state semi-finals or went into the state semi-finals. We ran up against a team of giants. They had lots of armor. They had hip pads and stuff like that. But it was a neat time.

I'll tell you, you're probably wanting to know. We were really poor. I'll tell you, if you want to know this kind of stuff, one place we lived up in Maeser did not have any heat. My mother asked me not too long before she died. She said, "Max, do you remember the cold winter?" And I said, "Which one?" They were all cold. It was forty below in Jensen at times, back in the '30s and when I was down there.

So, Andrew Vernon, up in Vernal, let Mother live in the basement of an unfinished new house. It had a roof on it and everything and the floor, but we lived downstairs and the studs were up. They put sheets and things around to make a little room. There was some electricity there and we had one electric light and Mother had a little hotplate, like they would have. And that's all we had. So, we slept with our clothes on, shoes and everything. I even ate my meals in bed, covered up and propped up. You know, I went to church on a regular basis then and got there a little bit early because of the heat. Same with school, school wasn't too far away and I'd go there and I'd kind of use their facilities to wash up and stuff.

I carried water at that time, about three-quarters of a mile round trip. There was a neighbor that would let Mother have water and he had an outside faucet. So, all the water we had to drink, I carried. Then once in a while, if it snowed, Mother would try to heat water on that hotplate to wash her clothes. She'd bring home school lunch leftovers and we'd eat on that. I'll tell you, I could eat just about anything, you know. It wasn't "did we like it," it was "was there anything to eat." There were two or three years that were kind of tough.

KI: Would that have been in the '30s?

Max: That would have been, let's see, I was born in '29, it might have been real close to 1940, I think, because that would make me about ten or eleven. I was big enough I could carry two buckets of water pretty easy and get home with most of it.

KI: Was Dale still living with you?

Max: I remember Dale being there, but it seems like he wasn't there too often.

KI: You didn't serve in the Second World War, then, did you? Because you would have been too young?

Max: No, I didn't serve in the war. I tried to get in. I was sixteen and Mother wouldn't sign for me to go. You have to realize, we were so poor I thought maybe that would be a good way for Mother to get an allotment check. Then I heard about the Merchant Marine. I thought, "Man!" And they were paying big money to anybody who would go. You had to have your parent's signature and she wouldn't let me go either. What I didn't know was that those Liberty ships were being sunk on a regular basis by the German U-boats, so I guess I'm lucky I didn't go.

But after that was over, after we got out of high school, no, during, a couple of years from then, starting in about 1944, I did join the civil air patrol. I wasn't able to fly yet. I did fly a plane later on, in about '46. But then after I graduated in 1947, I took a test for the Navy and Bill Demas and I took a test that the Navy gave for electronics. See, I'd taken all that stuff in school, a lot of geometry, algebra, advanced math, chemistry, physics, and so did he. He passed highest in Utah and I passed second highest. They wanted us to sign up right away and go back to the Great Lakes training area in Illinois. He went and at that time I was smitten with Pat and I decided I couldn't leave her. But I had joined the Naval Reserve and Carl Merkley and I lied about our experience and said we'd been on a shakedown cruise, and we did go on a two-week cruise with the regular Navy.

Then I joined the National Guard. I ended up being the mess steward there. I was in that for a time.

KI: Would that have been after you and Pat married?

Max: Yes. Yeah, I joined the National Guard. I was pretty dumb. I joined it just so I could play ping-pong.

KI: That's one reason to join, I guess!

Max: Well, they were doing it every drill night and they were having a lot of fun. I was working. I had quite a few jobs early on. To me, it was just a way to have entertainment and have some comradery. That was just before the Korean War. In fact, it was on. Then after I'd gotten in there, they started calling up Guard units. I thought, "Oh, no! What have I done?" But they didn't call ours.

KI: So you didn't go to Korea, either, then?

Max: No. No, we just stayed in Utah. In those days, after Pat and I got married, work was kind of scarce and I had five jobs at one time. All part-time.

KI: What did you do?

Max: I was the first parcel post carrier in Vernal and I was guaranteed two hours a day. Then I apprenticed for Western Jewelers and Sports Outfitters. Sweeney Ross was the jeweler and Stan King was the sports outfitter and I did custodial work to pay for my training as a horologist, or watch maker. That's what they called them back then. There were a lot of watch makers in

Vernal at that time. I still remember that it isn't what's on the dial that your watch really is. Back in those days, one of the best watches, the works was called an A-Shield 1187, that was the movement of the whole thing.

Then I ran the projectors at the Vogue Theater for a time. I worked for Pat's dad and put up billboards, then I worked at Fashion Cleaners. So I was pretty busy and I didn't have much time. There wasn't too many things to do for fun.

Dee Kempton had a pool hall. It was a pretty clean operation. All the businessmen, at lunch time, that could walk to it, would bring their sack lunch and hurry to get a spot to play pool. Boy, from about 11:30 to 1:30 it was jam-packed with business people. So you could go do that. But my main interests were fishing and hunting and sports.

KI: When did you specialize for a job and finally have a career?

Max: Well, I just took the one that grew. I stayed with the post office. As Vernal grew, the positions grew and deliveries picked up. I, eventually, in the post office, became assistant postmaster and then superintendent of postal operations. I turned down lots of offers to be postmaster at places. They wanted me to go to Boise and be postmaster there, in a branch, not the big one. And Salmon, Idaho, I could have had that. It was a real nice place. Boy, fishing and hunting! Boy, I could have had Park City or Heber, a lot of these places. But the thing of it was, by that time I had a part-time business. For twenty-five years I had the Lewis Outdoor Advertising, billboards on the highway. I'd worked with Pat's dad for a long time. But I was actually in it for twenty-five years after he leased it to me. So I did the construction, the building; I'd go around selling, I was a salesman. And I painted signs, you know, the imprints that went across the bottom. Then I'd actually post the billboards. It was busy times. I had both of those jobs. It evolved into the post office job and that part-time business.

I had a theory that if you worked hard, you should play hard and you should serve your community, too. Glen Cooper invited me to join the Jaycees and I did. I worked in the Jaycees. I was there when Ken Sowards was there and some of those guys were really dynamos, you know. I was just a new kid, but I did do a few things. I was editor of what they called "The Town Crier." Then, as far as civic work, after you get so old in the Jaycees, you become what they call an Exhausted Rooster. So then I was sponsored and joined the Kiwanis Club and was in that for quite a few years. At the time of my retirement I was a Rotarian. I was doing that. But in conjunction with all this, I had a job as secretary-treasurer for the Kiwanis and I was treasurer for the Elks Lodge and I was scoutmaster for six years and Order of the Arrow advisor at the same time for three.

Man, I'd come home from work and I'd get out here to the sidewalk and I'd start undoing my clothes. By the time I got in, I'd have my shirt undone and then I'd change and put clothes on, and then I'd go to some function or put up a billboard. Pat would have me a little sandwich or a meal. Now, every day wasn't that bad, but a good part of it. I was a good scoutmaster. I took the troops down to Lodore and hiked them up over the High Uintas on three- and four-day backpacks.

KI: Do you remember which troop it was?

Max: Yeah, it was Troop 232, Second Ward. I was there for, I think, two or three years, then moved into Third Ward and that was Troop 230. They selected me. One day some boys came down, Kevin Murray, he was an on-fire type of guy. Anyway, he was head of a committee of boys, honor scout campers, they came down and selected me and asked me if I would be OA [Order of the Arrow] advisor. It scared me to death because I knew how to run a scout troop, but I didn't know how to be with a whole bunch of boys from all the troops.

We did the OA a little different than they do now. In fact, in the first scout troop, before I got involved with it, Howard Carroll was one of my scouts. On the tap-outs there, why, they'd take the boys, the ones that got selected, there was only one or two from each troop, and they'd go out in a real remote area from the camp and they'd have them form a circle. Then they were each one to walk out, I think, three hundred steps and wherever they were stopped, that's where they spent the night. They could either take one egg or a slice of bread, they could take their choice. They didn't give them much time to prepare either. They could take their sleeping bag and that was it. They soon stopped that, though, because a lot of the boys were panicking and getting hurt. Our guys never did, but it evolved into a lot nicer thing.

We had an eagle feather presentation that we honored the Eagle Scouts. We got a big, old piece of tanned buckskin and since I letter and I was a pretty good artist, I drew an arrowhead and said that OA honors such and such. We put a feather, actually any kind of feather, a duck feather; we could buy imitation eagle feathers, too. Anyway, wherever the court of honor was held, why, without announcement, they would stomp in, beat their drum and the mighty chief Allowat Sakima and Nutiket and Meteu, the medicine man, would go stomping up and down there. The chief, Allowat Sakima, he'd raise his arms up and yell, "Silence!" At first it really startled the group and we didn't know if we'd get kicked out of scouting, but it went over very well. We waited until the Eagle had received his badge and then we did that, went in. There was a drummer, beat the drums. I don't think they do that anymore. With different leaders, it would evolve. But, we'd always find out where the Eagles were and we'd do that. Then after a while, we were expected to do it. We did that for the three years we were in. I don't know what happened after that.

KI: It sounds like you enjoyed it, though.

Max: Oh, I loved it. I was one of the kids!

KI: How many children did you have?

Max: We had two, Merridy, our daughter, and Preston, our son.

KI: Were you a scout leader for him?

Max: I started scouting before he was of age, then, yes, I was. He became an Eagle Scout and he had to work to earn it really a lot harder. For some reason, I didn't want anyone saying that I showed any favoritism. When we'd go out on our High Uinta camps and so on, I showed him the same interest as I did the other boys. He never did feel like he was scoutmaster's pet or whatever. It worked out really good. I think our scout troop, I've kind of lost track of them, but I think we produced about eight or ten Eagles in that time, which is pretty good.

KI: When you were working in the post office, you were here on Main Street in the old post office, right?

Max: Yes.

KI: I've been in there since it's been the print shop, but what was it like then?

Max: When I first started, or when I left?

KI: Both.

Max: When I first started, you've probably seen pictures at the library of the steps going up out front?

KI: Yes.

Max: And everybody parked at an angle to the curb? When I first started in 1950, those massive front steps were there and the post office was pretty little. You went into the lobby and it had windows that you'd lift up. When you'd close, you'd shut the window and lock it and people in the lobby could still get their lock-box mail. They had a COD section, a money order section, a General Delivery window and a parcel post window. It was adequate for the community before it started to grow. Then, after a time, we didn't have enough lock-boxes and we couldn't handle the increasing parcel post. During Christmas rush, we'd rent a big building, one that happened to be vacant, and we'd call that the parcel post annex. This was before United Parcel came in. So, we did that.

Begin Tape 2

KI: You were talking about the post office, about parcel post.

Max: Did I mention that UPS came in and took over? But this was before UPS. We had a huge volume. The mail came in about nine o'clock in the morning from Salt Lake. That was really quite late in the day for us to try to get the mail up for the business people. We tried to have it up by noon, but sometimes we couldn't do it. Then we had another mail come in from Craig.

KI: Is that because of a train, or trucks, or what?

Max: I think so. In those days we were under the US Post Office Department. It was different. Now we're under the United States Postal Service, which is supposedly a different entity. But under the old department days, why, I think the routing system, the trains, Craig was probably the closest place. Then, everybody ordered from Montgomery Ward and Sears and, boy, that Craig mail, boy, it was big, especially during Christmas rush time. So, we had quite a time getting that out.

I remember times as a carrier. Now, I served part of my career as a carrier that carried it on your back with a leather strap. Then I went to a bicycle, then I supervised the jeeps. But when I'd deliver mail, there was one time that there was so much mail. Everybody mailed to everybody else. I mean, a street like this, back then, we'd send a card to everybody on the street and everybody we knew in town and they would do the same thing. I remember going up to 250 South one time carrying that bag and I picked up more mail than I had delivered. It was just awful!

I had to tie bundles of mail that hung down on the outside. It was really good for me health-wise, but it just about worked us to death. We'd have to wade in the snow and stuff like that. In our growing stages, we had to carry it all out as we left. We didn't have any relay boxes or anything like that, so sometimes you'd see these poor guys, including myself, go out and didn't even hardly have a hand to sort the mail. Because the mail came in so late, in the wintertime I had to carry a little flashlight and hold it in my mouth so I could see what I was doing.

KI: With the parcel post, did you leave notices at people's houses to go to the post office to pick it up, or did someone deliver it to their house?

Max: Well, like I said, I was the first parcel post carrier and as time went on, we had a bigger and better delivery truck for parcel post. The carrier would take it right to your door. If you weren't home, then he would leave you a notice and take the parcel back. There was none of this leaving it on the doorstep like UPS. You either had a package or a notice.

Things were pretty relaxed in those days on carrier service. I've helped people move. People were moving furniture about and I'd set my bag down and go help them. We weren't given a lunch hour or anything, so we had to make up time if we wanted to sit down and have a sandwich that we carried with us. One time I remember I was selling a COD [cash on delivery] package and the lady didn't have change or something. For some reason she had to go next door, but she was cooking her stuff on the stove. So, she asked me to watch her stuff and stir it while she gone. Can you imagine that nowadays?

KI: They don't even get out of their cars these days. Do you have door-to-door service down here?

Max: Yes.

KI: Where I am we just have curbside.

Max: And I apologize for that because I was one of the first that had to enforce that.

KI: It doesn't bother me at all.

Max: When I first started out, I guess having it delivered to your door was, I thought, quality service. Often they'd send me away to training and school, down in LA, mostly. This one time they told us we were going to go to curbside delivery. We couldn't force anyone that had door delivery to go curbside, but all new areas would be curbside. So we came back and John Jones

and Reed Birchell and I, we'd go around residential areas that had door delivery and we'd ask them if they'd accept a mailbox and a post, if they'd put it up out there on the curb. A lot of people did. It was pretty good, but it was something I felt was bad because of the quality of service issue.

KI: Because if you're delivering at the curb, there's no opportunity for you to stir the lady's pot while she goes to get money, right? That's a real service. I can see that.

Max: Yeah, that's right! Well, in those first years I worked there, I guess, maybe the formative years of my feelings for service, the rural carriers in those days were required once a year for two weeks to count the mourning doves that they would observe on their routes. The post service, in those days, did a lot of work for other, different branches of the government. We wrote treasury checks for the ASCS office that used to be upstairs in that old building.

KI: What is that?

Max: Agricultural Soil Conservation Service. So, they'd come down with a fistful of money. By that time I was in charge of the postal checks, or the government checks. All I had to do was make one out and sign it, and I could have really had a party until they caught me!

KI: But you were honest.

Max: Yeah. Then we used to get money for all the banks to come in on Sunday. I mean currency, great big sacks of currency and coins and stuff. So we had a lot of temptations, but we didn't think the fishing would be any better anywhere else. We just kidded around about that. But anyway, they'd come down with their money and we'd make them out their check and then they'd go.

Do you remember Leonard Perry at all? He was one of the old postal guys. He used to spend part of his days calling up people. See, all the mail back then, at the very first, was just your name and Vernal, Utah. There were no addresses. So he'd get on the phone. He'd call all around and see where somebody got their mail. It could be just a piece of advertisement, a piece of bulk business mail. So, he'd do that. Anymore, if it isn't addressed, you don't know where they're at, you can't deliver it and you toss it in the garbage can.

We had a lot of good days at the post office. In the earlier days, I think Pontha Calder was postmaster and later on Frank Slaugh. We'd work really hard, this was when the mail came in late, and we'd work sometimes until 11 o'clock at night trying to get the mail ready for the next day. But our wives would come down at 6 or 6:30, when the windows closed, and they'd bring a hot meal. We'd spend a half hour on government time just having that meal. We didn't get overtime for it, but they did give us compensatory time. We never did get paid overtime for a long time. Then the unions got active and then we got overtime.

KI: Can you remember any particular experiences when you were delivering mail on foot? Did dogs ever get you?

Max: Often. Yeah, we were an outpost out here. We didn't have much contact. We didn't know that we didn't have to deliver where a dog was. We thought we had to make that delivery. So, I would arm myself with whatever it took to go in and make a delivery. If I could find a rock or a stick or something, I would have it handy in case the dog came at me, and usually it did. A lot of them did. Finally, I discovered a water pistol with ammonia in it. Let me tell you, they'd back off. You didn't even have to hit them too good. But nobody complained. Then as time went on, they issued these little spray cans of Halt, which is a harmless thing.

I had one bird dog that bothered me all the time. So I got this water pistol with household ammonia in it. It'd start to come at me and I'd hit it in the forehead. It would back off and go away. Finally, after summer nearly was over, I could walk up to that dog and the dog'd just lay down and close its eyes. I didn't hit it, I'd just come somewhere where it could smell it. We went through that routine for the rest of the time.

KI: You trained that dog pretty well.

Max: Yep! I've been bitten a lot. Of course, now, if your dog bites a carrier, the carrier is required to sue you over it, I think. I'll have to talk to them again. But they have to report it and the superintendent of postal operations comes out. They make a big thing out of it.

KI: Probably as a deterrent to other people.

Max: Yeah. Even back when I was in the postal service, if there was a real bad dog loose on the street, you didn't even have to go down that street if you didn't want to. You'd just tell your supervisor and he'd call the people.

KI: How long did you work for the postal service?

Max: Thirty-four years.

KI: When did you retire? How long ago?

Max: In 1984.

KI: '84, really? You've been retired that long?

Max: Yes. I'm one of the few that are really getting their money's worth. But I started when I was nineteen. Pretty young when I started. Some of the guys, I watched them, and they worked until they were sixty-five. Frank Slaugh went on, as a postmaster, until he was seventy-two. Then he retired and remarried. His first wife died. He thought he was a kid again. He went out in the wheat fields and hayfields. He'd come in all sunburned and everything and it didn't take long and he was dead. He had a heart attack. Most of them are dead. There's only one person left and that's Reed Birchell. I mean from when I first started. There's quite a few of them that are alive that are retired now that I worked with, but when I first started, out of the original bunch, Reed and I are only two that's left. It's kind of scary.

KI: But you seem very healthy and well.

Max: Oh, I am.

KI: All those years of delivering the mail, huh?

Max: Yeah, and I worked out for a lot of years in martial arts, too. So, I got that, too. I started that when I was about thirty-five. I started studying it and working out at home. Then when I was forty-three I took a class in Shotokan karate, which is one of the four basic styles of Japan. It's a hard system, meaning they go in for one-punch kills and stuff like that. Some Kung-fu systems are called soft systems, meaning they take two or three moves before they do their thing, you know. I studied that and became a sempi, which means head student. It doesn't mean I was the best. It meant I had studied longer and trained longer and knew more about it than the younger guys. But then, if you're in your forties, you can't compete too much with guys in their twenties, you know. But anyway, I was sempi there and I studied Kung fu for a time to get a blend.

KI: Did you do all that studying here?

Max: Yeah. We had a guy, Rob Neilsen, came here and he was a black belt. He studied under Osaka, then out of BYU at Provo. Rob was a hard taskmaster. To get even a green belt from him was equivalent to a much higher belt from somebody else. When I quit martial arts, I was working on my black belt under Rob. I got to where I could enjoy circle sparring, where you're out in the middle and there's a ring of people around you. They all have a number and the sensi, or the instructor, would yell, "Three, seven, four." And when your number was called, you ran in and attacked the guy. And he countered and did something and met each person. At first it was a pre-arranged attack like to the face or the stomach. Then after a while it was just whatever you felt like. So, I was at that point when I stopped.

KI: That's really interesting. You've just done a lot of different things, haven't you?

Max: Yeah, I guess. I worked out in judo for a while, but I'd had a back fusion in 1963. In judo there's a lot of throws. I didn't mind throwing people, but I hated to be thrown. So, I had to get out of that and I got into something easier, like karate, which is not easier, but easier on my back. It was good discipline.

KI: One thing I was wondering is whether you remember any controversial issues. For example, you mentioned that you had been working with the Jaycees, and about that time, when Ken Sowards was the president, I believe, they had the big thing with Echo Park Dam.

Max: Yeah, I remember that. There was a lot of controversy about that. Of course, I'd just gotten into that and Ken was promoting it. Oh, Echo Park down here by Split Mountain?

KI: Yes. He was a promoter of that.

Max: Yes, it seems like that didn't go through for some reason, but most people in Vernal were behind it.

KI: The Sierra Club fought against it and eventually had their way in Washington, D.C., which is why it fizzled. But they got Flaming Gorge instead.

Max: Yeah, that was too bad, too. I remember seeing a lot of presentations. Of course, in those days I was a listener and learning. Ken Sowards and Dale Jensen and LaMar Hawkins and Whitney Hammond. Do you remember Whitney? Whitney was a lawyer and one of my chess buddies. Of course, Glen Cooper with all that. It was a strong club. Vernal had a strong Jaycee Club. I was just fortunate to be in there on the tail end. As I went in, these guys, like Ken, were starting to leave, as Exhausted Roosters, and other people took the reins.

KI: Did you get in on the hospital fund drive when they were doing the slot machines?

Max: Well, I got in on the tail end of that, too. But I wasn't instrumental in any of that, except I supported it. These things were already in progress. Let's see, there was the hospital and swimming pool, I think, was the main agenda on that slot machine. I remember there was a lot of talk. They were in place when I was there, when I first started. Then it seems like there was some opposition to the slot machines. Let me tell you, those slot machines were a great thing. People were just more than willing to put a few dollars in there. I put my share in. I put in two dollars a month sometimes! That was big!

KI: Were they a quarter a pull?

Max: They had a nickel, dime and quarter.

KI: I think they had a dollar machine in one place because somebody, whether it was Ken or somebody else, told me that. He said they would sometimes have to go and empty the money twice a day because people would come through and just dump money into that.

Max: Now, I never did get in on any of the collection stuff and that. See, Ken is probably, like my brother, he's probably about eight or nine years older than I am. So, he'd have been in the final stages of the Jaycee government when I was coming in as the new kid on the block. There were quite a few of us who came in that way, but those guys, they were wheeler-dealers.

KI: Do you remember any businesses downtown here that were really important to the community? For example, I'm sure you remember Ashtons.

Max: Oh, yeah. I was just thinking. I think all the businesses were important. Shopping away from home was discouraged. I did a program for the Rotary Club once and I was telling how Vernal was. They wanted me to do a program on the post office and I was so bored with postal stuff, I thought, well, I'll just do a program based around old locations and businesses when I first came to Vernal and got married. So, I did. There was only two guys that could correct me on anything. Nick Meagher Jr. and Don Showalter could verify what I was telling them was true.

Ashtons helped the community more than anybody that I can remember. One of our friends, Pat's relation, is Bert Carroll. He used to deliver for Ashtons. All you had to do was pick

up the phone and say, "Four, please," and you'd get Ashtons. You'd tell them what you wanted and the delivery boy would run it out. You didn't even need have to sign for it. It just had the slip in there.

KI: Did they bill once a month?

Max: I guess. I don't know. I never did do that myself. But I do know that Rae Ashton and his wife, Eva, were very civic-minded and so were the boys. I know Stew brought in the Blue Angels.

KI: He was a pilot, wasn't he?

Max: Yes, a Naval pilot. They're all politicians. They weren't involved, but I think Ralph told my wife, they went out to a wedding in Salt Lake and Ralph was pointing out who of the Mafia attended that. But they had Vernal's interest at heart and I think they went way beyond making money. They liked making money, but they were a great store.

KI: Who was in the Co-op Building at that time? Was Penney's there when you were in the post office?

Max: Yes, J.C. Penney Company.

KI: And then there was Cobble Rock Station on the corner. Who was down Vernal Avenue from there? Was Christensen's down there?

Max: No. You want to know who was in the Cobble Rock?

KI: Claudius Banks would have been in the Cobble Rock about that time. Who was down from there?

Max: Yeah, he was one of them. I've had my hair cut there and eaten meals in the Cobble Rock. They had a little café and barbershop, and Dean Reynolds had Dean's Basin Marine under there, too, at one time.

KI: When Claudius was still in there or after it closed?

Max: I don't know. Claudius may have been out.

KI: He left in 1956.

Max: Yeah, he would have been out. I think he would have been gone. Dean's Basin Marine, he worked on boats and things under that shelter. I think he had a little storage area, too.

KI: There was a pawn shop in there for a while, too.

Max: I didn't know that.

KI: I am interested in that. I've been researching it, but I've had a hard time finding what happened after Claudius left because there was a series of little things that came and went.

Max: Yeah. Let's see, Elmer Perry and Al Bowden and somebody else had a barbershop. Then I remember somebody, to the east, had a little restaurant.

KI: Maud's Café?

Max: No, I mean right under the loft.

KI: Oh, underneath or right to the east?

Max: It wasn't the little trailer thing. I think Maud's was a little streetcar thing, wasn't it?

KI: I don't know what it looked like. I just know it was there. I haven't been able to find a picture of it. Anyway, they tore the station down in 1970. So there was a fourteen year span, and it was boarded up a few years even before 1970. So there were maybe ten years in there that it was just one thing after the next.

Max: Well, yeah. And, you know, as you go on south on Vernal Avenue from there, there was a hotel there, Central Hotel they called it, especially the upstairs. You'd go upstairs to the Central Hotel. Pat, what business was under the Central Hotel? You know where Hacking's Furniture was? It was back this way a little bit.

KI: Christensen's was in there for a while.

Max: I'll bet it was Jolley's Furniture.

Pat: It could have been. I don't remember. It seems like there was a furniture store in there, but I don't know who owned it.

KI: It was a furniture store several different times over the course of the years.

Pat: Oh, really? What was their name that had it there?

KI: Collier's was there.

Pat: Collier's! That's the oldest one that was there, I think, that I can remember.

KI: It was originally an automobile showroom and a garage. The garage was upstairs before they made it into rooms up there. But that happened in the 1920s, even before you were born. Then that building just changed hands over and over and it would be a furniture store here, and Christensen's was in there for a while. Mr. S was across the street where the bank drive-through is.

Pat: That was when Russ Holley sold it to Sam [Snyder]. It was called Russell's then. Then Sam turned it to Mr. S.

Max: There are a lot of things to talk about. It's hard to talk about a lifetime. That clock you see is a Seth Thomas. It has a spring-loaded pendulum escapement system. See, I learned a little bit when I was apprenticing. So, when the Vernal Post Office went to electric clocks, they took all these clocks like that and just threw them down into the coal room. We had a furnace that burned slack.

KI: Here comes your mail to your door.

Max: You know, I can tell who delivers my mail. I don't have to see them. I can tell by the way the put it in the box.

KI: That was a bit of an aside. I'm sorry, let's go on.

Max: Anyway, I wanted to tell you what happened. See, the post office wasn't supposed to give that away. Nowadays, if you had something like that, the inspection service would be on your case. But I was up at the counter and some woman was up there wanting to know if she could have one of these clocks. Frank Slaugh, he always rubbed his head up here when he acted like he was thinking, he was bald, and he said, "Well, yeah, I guess you can have one. Just go down and pick yourself out one." And I said, "Can I have one, too?" And he said, "Well, yeah." So, Garl Gardiner got one, he got the time clock. So I had taken that clock and restarted it. I wrote to Seth Thomas and got the parts I needed. The only reason it isn't running now is that it needs to be cleaned again and I haven't taken time to do it. But they are very, very accurate.

KI: It is a gorgeous clock.

Max: The only thing wrong with it, the pivots, you've heard of jewels and so on? Well, the pivots just go through into brass. The pivots are kind of oblong. There's a kind of end shake on the pivots. So all I have to do is drill the hole out and put in a new piece of brass and puncture another little hole. But it runs so good without doing that. Do you see that little screw on the bottom of the pendulum? If it's running a little slow, you crank it up and if it's running fast, you lower it down. So the pendulum makes a longer stroke. Now you've really heard whether you wanted to or not.

KI: Do you wind it?

Max: Yes, you have to wind it up. See that hole in the top? That's where you wind it up and that bar there, that big cylinder dropping down, that's what powers the drive train, the weight on that powers the drive train. Then there's all these teeth, what we call a pallet fork, and the escapement wheel and it kind of has that type of motion. As the weight pulls down, the escapement wheel and the pallet fork only lets so much of it go down at a time. So, that turns the second hand up there. It does fifty little ticks. Instead of sixty, it's fifty on that one. Have you ever seen these

little “crickets” that you go click-click? Okay, that’s the power spring, or the little thing that’s hooked onto the pendulum. It’s dirty and it needs to be cleaned, so the wheels are kind of slow. So, I’ll tear it apart this winter.

KI: It’s good you can do that on your own. Is that original or did you have it refinished?

Max: No. When we first got it, we painted it green to match our house over on 5th South. Then after a while we decided we’d like the real thing. So, we stripped all that paint off it and that’s just the way it looked. The post office had those all over. They had maybe one in the lobby, then in each one of the sections, money order, COD section, and several scattered around. Then upstairs in the Forest Service they had them up there. It was the custodian’s job to go around and keep them wound and set to the right time. That was one of their jobs.

KI: Do you happen to have any photographs of the interior of the post office?

Max: I have a movie. This is a movie of the people I used to work with when I first started. I have it on a big old reel.

KI: Not on a videotape?

Max: No. Maybe I can put it on tape.

KI: We’d be interested in seeing what it was like.

Max: Well, I’ll tell you. I think it was Dave Ahrensbrak, Dave or somebody, came and asked for some old photos of the post office, some before there was any construction on it and then the construction. I had a big stack of them and I consulted with the postmaster and I don’t know if he called Salt Lake, we were in the Postal Service then, and it was agreed that they were supposed to be on loan. But I’ve been retired since 1984 and it was a few years before that. They might be down in the library someplace.

KI: I’ve seen photos of the exterior, but I’ve never seen any of the interior. That’s what I’d be interested in. Seeing all these stations and what the lobby looked like. You think Dave might still have them?

Max: Well, he shouldn’t. As I understood it, he was going to take them to the library and use them for a resource or something.

KI: Well, can you think of anything else you’d like to tell me?

Max: I don’t know what you’d be interested in. Mostly there are just a lot of tall tales.

KI: But I like tall tales. Can you think of something you want to tell me? Some of these childhood stories are just great. I love those.

Max: Well, you’ve got the article about fishing. Do you want more of that?

KI: What I'll do is attach that article to the transcription when I finish it.

Max: Those were fun days. You know, the thing of it is, I think the reason, in those days everyone was pretty healthy. You didn't worry about things. You see all these obese people these days, but as kids we rode our bicycles all over, and ran, and we'd swim in the Green River. All those old former relations of mine, there wasn't one of them that was heavy and they ate all the bad things. They had a pot of bacon drippings on the back of the stove and any grease they had left over they'd pour in that thing and they'd use that to cook with all the time. You didn't see any of them that were heavy. I bet if we ate like that now, you couldn't get through that door.

KI: No, because we don't do the same work.

Max: Yeah. It's the work that's the thing. Well, I'd have to have a memory peg to jog me. Speaking of memory pegs, I took a Dale Carnegie course with, I think Ken was in it, I know Glade Sowards was and a lot of the businessmen, Gene Hall. It was a fun thing that we did.

KI: Did you do it as Jaycees or Rotarians?

Max: No. The instructor's name was Jack Brimhall and he came in and charged \$60. That was unheard of. I had to make payments! You laugh!

KI: Well, I don't laugh too much because I know how much money that would have been at the time.

Max: Well, when I started working at the post office, I can't remember how much I was getting, but I'd worked there several years and the year that I made over \$2000 a year, Pat and I really celebrated and that was during that time. I think a new car cost anywhere from \$1400 to \$1800 if you got just the Ford/Chevrolet type, but it was really something. We bought this old house over on 5th South, the old Tenney place over there, I think it's 172 West on 5th South, and we remodeled it and got a few things from Sears, you know, a new stove, etc. What I'm trying to get to is, every two weeks we had a dollar and a half extra that we could spend anyway we wanted to.

KI: What would you do with it?

Max: Well, sometimes we'd go to a show; sometimes we'd buy something that we needed. I remember one time, about the time I got into archery, I started archery in 1952, and I had to make arrows to sell to finance my interest and I sold new bows. I'd buy a new bow and I'd use it for a while, then I'd sell it. I had a wholesale source. But I remember this one time I took that whole dollar and a half and bought a dozen wood shafts. I couldn't buy any feathers or points or anything, just the shafts. Then the next time I got the rest of the stuff.

KI: Well, I understand where you're coming from.

Max: I've got one other little story that really made an impression on me. Working in my early years, when I was in the ninth grade I went to work on a ranch on White River for my Uncle Ward. He paid me a dollar a day plus whatever I could eat. So I worked that whole summer and I got so strong you can't believe it, for a ninth grader.

Do you know what a fresno is? A scraper behind a horse, a two-handled thing. He had me cleaning canals and all those ditches and I had this horse. You have to envision a ninth-grader; I'd go down and angle the blade and scoop up the mud. When it got filled, we'd take it up the bank and it was all I could do to push up on the handles to catch the lip of the scraper and dump the mud. You do that for quite a few weeks or a month or so and pretty quick you get strong.

I came into town. I had the chance to come into town that one time. Ward let me come up. So I went in the Vernal Drug and there these Vernal athletes were and they were squeezing this bathroom scale. Boy, they were getting it around there. Raymond York was one of them. The other guys are dead, Reed Hullinger. Anyway, they were squeezing it and they were getting it up to what they thought was real good. I wanted to be accepted, I wanted a friend, so I said, "Let me have a turn." So, I took that scale and I pegged it out. I went around and pegged it out. They looked at me and said, "Do that again." So I did it again. My hands were just solid calluses; I couldn't afford any gloves.

Then they went down and had a Coke and I joined them. They were going to arm wrestle for the Cokes, see. They didn't want to include me, but I said I'd do the winner. Well, the same thing happened. When it was my turn, I got the guy and I just went down real quick. They didn't think he was ready, so I did it again. Old Raymond York looked at me and he said, "Just where in the hell did you come from anyway?"

Anyway, that's what I did then. Then in the tenth grade I worked as a roughneck on an oil rig. That was pretty rough for a young boy, too. I earned enough money that summer to fix Dale's car. He'd wrecked it before he went into the Marine Corps. So, Lloyd Eaton had a body and fender place right across from the old post office. I think he called it Hotel Service. Anyway, I had it fixed there.

The next year I worked as a roustabout in the oil patch. It was pretty good money. In the tenth grade, when I worked as a roughneck, see, the war was on.

KI: This was only during the summers, right?

Max: Oh, yes. I went on to school, but I worked as a roughneck. The war was on, they couldn't find any men, so they'd take anything. I mean, I was really too young to be working out there, but they took younger kids than me. They had a time-and-a-half day and a double-time day each week, because there were no days off, you worked seven days. If you went to work on another rig, if another rig wanted to change the bit and run the pipe and they didn't have enough crew, they would call over and borrow that crew. If you went over there and even if you worked just an hour or two, whatever it took, why, you'd get paid a day's wages there and a day's wages at the other place. I did that once on a double-time day, so I got the equivalent of four day's pay. I'll tell you!!

KI: Did you help your mom a lot with your wages?

Max: Well, yeah, what I could. I put a lot of it into Dale's car.

KI: So that you could drive the car?

Max: Well, he was coming home. The war was getting close to being over and he was coming home. It was a patriotic thing. Dale let me take it afterward. I drove it until he got home, but after that it was by permission. I don't know whether he'd have fixed it up or just bought another. But you didn't buy cars then. Or if you could, like Pat's dad, he bought one. He paid black market price from the Chevrolet garage over here. He said, "I'll pay you so much extra to get this car." And that's what was happening, because they were hard to be found. Because all the production had gone into the war. So, it was just a case of repairing the old stuff and getting it going again.

KI: What else did you do after that? Did you work in the oil field the rest of your high school years until you graduated?

Max: Well, no. When I graduated, I left home. I didn't know I was leaving home, but I wanted to go to work out at Geneva Steel. They had openings. The employment office down here in Central School, in the old building there, their information was bad, but they said, "Oh, yes, there's work out at Geneva Steel." So, there were five of us went to go to work out there. I didn't have any money, we were always poor, so Mother went and borrowed \$20 from somebody and gave it to me. So, I left home with that twenty dollar bill and a quilt and a frying pan or something and some clothes, and I was going out there to work at Geneva Steel.

We got out there and there was no work, so, we were all in a bad situation. We'd spent some money foolishly on the way, in Heber. You can imagine us being out of high school, men of the world. So, we camped out on the banks of the Provo River. We looked just like hippies, I'm sure, but we just camped out there for a week or so, rain or shine. Then the cherry crop started to come on and some of the guys started to pick cherries. Bert and I went down to the lumberyard and we worked there for a week. He was strong, but he was little, short.

KI: Bert who?

Max: Carroll. Bert was Howard Carroll's half-brother. They put us to work throwing these big beams out of railcars. Well, I could get my end up okay, but he couldn't quite reach. So, I'd have to put my end up and go down and after a week of that, I couldn't stand it. But we had enough money that we rented a place, for a time, but we didn't have much to eat. So we'd go down to the Walgreen Drugstore and there was a gal that was sympathetic and so we'd order a small bowl of soup, then she'd bring down all kinds of crackers, you know, so we'd fill up on that.

I ended up working at the mental hospital, quite a few of us did, because they had one free meal a day that was included. Because of my size I got picked for the violent ward. Harold Bodily, who turned out to be a special agent for the FBI, he was big, but he had farm experience or something, so they put him with the farm crew and they'd go out and do farm work. Then, Bert and Paul, they were kind of small, so they put them in the infirmary where they went around the rooms and cleaned up and so on.

I had a lot of experiences in that violent ward. I've seen a guy cut his throat and his wrists. He was in a cage, bars just going up, and the head attendant said, "Come on, we're going to go in there and take that razor away from him." And I thought, "I don't care if he keeps it. He can have it." So, I was pretty nervous. But all we did was, we grabbed a mattress, it was a single

mattress, about like that, off one of the beds. All I had to do was to push him up against the bars, then each one of those guys took a hand.

KI: You were just out of high school, huh?

Max: Yes. There were a lot of things like that that happened in that violent ward that I don't think I could take now. The first thing they taught us was how to make a blackjack out of a bar of hard soap and a sock. He said, "You can hit them as hard as you want, if you're attacked. You can hit them as hard as you want and it won't fracture them or give them a concussion, the bar of soap will shatter first." I never did have to do that.

But after I'd worked there awhile I took a promotion and went over to the dumb building, what they called the dumb building. They were a nicer bunch, they weren't violent. Let's see, I worked out there, this was all before I went to the post office. I worked at Utah Poultry and sold chickens from Lehi to Payson. Two days a week I did that, then I cut up the chickens. There were only two of us in the plant. We cut up the chickens however they wanted them, whether they were ordered by pieces. Then the other two days of the week I'd deliver them. I had a good boss. If we got our work done, we'd go fishing up on the Provo River.

Then I worked at Provo Plumbing and Heating. I had a pretty good thing going there. But I finally did get back to Geneva. At first I worked in a blast furnace. One had all ready exploded. When I got there, I drove past the ruins every day. You had to wear big, heavy shoes underneath your regular shoes because it was so hot. On that blast furnace, you had what you called "tweers" that you could look in. We had to keep breaking them open. So, we'd take a rod and put in there. One guy would hold it and kind of turn it and the other guy would take a sledge hammer and take a swing and hit it. It was kind of rough work. I didn't really like it. It was too hot. Then when the slag was ready to pour, it seems like they had ditches in the sand that the slag would run down into a container. Then I got into the coke ovens and that was a better job.

KI: You did all this in the space of a year or something?

Max: Yeah, about a year, year and a half. Let's see, the mental hospital thing was right out of high school. See, I went out to Provo to go to school. I was just going to put myself through college. One of my teachers, Lawrence Cooper, wanted me to be an architectural draftsman. He thought I was good material, so he let me take his stuff, his drawing board and all his tools of the trade. So, I went out there to go. Well, this stuff was stored and I got sick at one point out there. I got really sick. I had a big infection and I had to put on a "Y" [BYU] T-shirt—I couldn't afford to go to a doctor—my brother was going to school out there and I would go up with him. I posed as a "Y" student, which was bad, someone will probably come get me! But I got a lot of penicillin shots. Finally, they gave my brother a vial of penicillin and told him to give it to me every so often. That's how I got allergic to penicillin. I can't take it.

Yeah, all that happened... I'm trying to think when I came home.

KI: Did you come home to marry Pat?

Max: Yeah. She had come home and I stayed out and worked for a while. Yeah, I think it all must have happened in a year and a half. No more than two years. Yeah, I had a lot of jobs out there. But I just kept going for a better job.

Then Pat came home. It was easy for me to get back. You just don't know how easy it was to hitchhike in those days. All you had to do was put on this "Y" T-shirt and stand out on road and put up your thumb. Everybody felt patriotic. The war had just barely gotten over and there were enough soldiers hitchhiking and sailors. There wasn't that much traffic on the road, and I could make real good time coming home. Do the same thing leaving. I'd just get out and go. So, it was an easy mode.

KI: I really appreciate talking with you today. You've had a great life.

End of tape.

The following are two stories Max Stewart related to Kathleen Irving that were published in *The Rivers We Know* (Uintah County Library, 2002).

Dining By the Green River

Early in the day, after the morning chores were done, all my uncles and aunts and their families and neighbors living in the Jensen and Brush Creek area that could attend, assembled by the big, old cottonwood tree near the spot where Cacklebur Wash empties into the Green River.

We were going to have a fish fry. Fresh fish was a great treat, a feast that was worth waiting for. There wasn't any good way to keep fish from spoiling as there was no refrigeration in those days, and only a few folks had ice storage cellars. All the fish harvested were either cooked and eaten that day or taken home to be pressure canned in bottles for later consumption.

Fishing from the bank with a pole was too slow for my uncle, Jerry Hatch. He had a large family to provide for and had found that using a seine produced an ample amount of fish in a hurry. This method was just what was required to feed this large, hungry gathering of friends and family.

Jerry and the men took the seine to the south bank of Cacklebur Wash, where it empties into the river. The channel was deep. My brother, Dale Stewart, and cousin, Bill Hatch, took one end of the seine rope and swam across to the north bank. Then the men on both sides of the channel started to slowly pull the seine up the channel and away from the Green River while two men on horseback rode down the stream, driving fish into the net. Two or three men were required to raise the huge load of fish out of the water and place them in wash tubs.

The catch included "whitefish" (squawfish), "round-tails" (bonytail chub), carp, "humpies" (humpback chub), suckers (razorback suckers), and channel catfish. All were cleaned, cut into pieces suitable for cooking and the carp were skinned.

A large-diameter fire had been started, and after the blaze burned down to hot coals, the fish were placed in Dutch ovens for cooking. There must have been at least a dozen Dutch ovens in the coals. The smell of fish frying or baking in bacon grease was overpowering. The women added to this meal with homemade bread, green beans from the garden, pork and beans, pickles, and everything else a pot-luck fish fry could provide.

When the announcement came that the first batch of fish was done, dinner was ready and come and get it, we all rejoiced (especially me)!

After all had eaten their fill and the meal was over, the men sat in the shade of the big, old cottonwood tree near the bank of the Green River. Some drank coffee while others rolled Bull Durham cigarettes. Crops and politics and a few jokes were the topics of discussion. The women grouped together, too, exchanging the latest news about the community, as well as local gossip and homemaking techniques. Children were constantly running about, playing a variety of games such as tag, steal-the-flag, and hide and seek. After they got tired and hot from the sun, they took a refreshing plunge in the cool waters of the river. Occasionally one or two kids paused by the Dutch ovens to grab a portion of hot, succulent fish, and then dashed off, eating as they played.

Life was sweet and all was well with the world.

From the Green River to the Green Hornet

Once upon a time, on the west bank of the Green River, where the lower drain of Stewart's Lake runs into the river, I, a young fourteen-year-old boy, was fishing on that narrow point of land. My favorite place to catch fish was where the two streams met. There was an abundance of channel catfish to be caught at this spot as well as squawfish, bonytail chub, humpback chub, razorback suckers, carp and sun perch. However, I was very selective on this trip, keeping only the catfish.

Rising early in the morning was my routine on Saturdays that summer. With Mother's permission and weather permitting, I greeted the day with great anticipation and excitement and prepared to go fishing.

First, I dug a can of angleworms out of the ditch bank. I ate a hasty breakfast, then I was off on my bicycle, traveling east on Highway 40 from my home in Jensen, turning south on the road to Stewart's Lake, then riding along the levee (in those days the lake held seven square miles of water) to where the lower drain exited the lake. I pushed my bicycle along the narrow trail to my fishing spot. The morning sun was still quite low in the east, so I had plenty of time, and the weather was nice.

I selected a suitable tamarack limb, trimmed it and cut it to length. Next, I attached my fishing line to the rear of the pole and strung it to the tip, securing it with a couple of half-hitches. The rest of the line I unwound from the floater where it was already attached. I threaded the worm on the bait hook, then cast into the water. Before long, the fun began.

The only sound was that of the rushing current of the river. Occasionally the song of a blackbird or a meadowlark added to the harmonious symphony of the stream. With a stringer of nice channel catfish, I pushed my bicycle back to the levee and started the long ride home. That's when the work began. First, all the fish had to be cleaned and the heads cut off, then I carefully wrapped them in the cleanest material that I could find. Now that the fish were cleaned, I looked to my own appearance. I had to look as good as I could because I was headed to town— Vernal—about fifteen miles up the highway.

Gas was being rationed because of World War II. But everyone was well known in Jensen and there was a feeling of patriotism and unity. Everyone pulled together for a common cause. Getting to town was easy. All I had to do was stand on US Highway 40 and stick out my hand with the thumb pointing up. Usually the first car that came by would stop for anyone needing a ride.

Upon arriving in Vernal, my fish securely under my arm, I walked the two blocks to Doc Hurst's Tourist Home. Earlier in the summer I had been informed that Doc Hurst loved fish and would pay good money for some. I never knew if he would be at home, so it was with great anticipation that I knocked on his shop door. He was there. At the invitation to enter, I went in and presented the fish. Doc Hurst was an imposing man to a young boy like me. He was middle-aged, short and stocky, always had a week's growth of beard, wore a dirty hat and small horn-rimmed glasses, which he peered over. His speech was punctuated with short grunts. "Are these fish fresh?" he asked, as he poked them suspiciously with his finger, and then, "When did you catch them?" Satisfied with my answers, he reached into his pocket and handed me fifty cents for my morning's work, regardless of how many or how few fish there were. That was the routine I constantly endured. Until I had that fifty cents in hand, I was not certain of the sale.

With all that money in my pocket, I carefully thought about the best way to spend it and get the most out of it. The thought of saving any never occurred to me. Most of the time I would enjoy a hamburger at Warren Belcher's outdoor Pig Stand, then go across the street to the Main Theater. There was enough money left to pay for the Saturday matinee and some candy.

When I left Jensen in the morning, I didn't know what movie was showing, but I knew exactly what the weekly serial was: "The Green Hornet." I anxiously looked forward to the weekly installment, and I was thankful for the Green River and the good fishing it provided.

It was a wonderful time in my life, fishing on the Green River, then watching my favorite serial "The Green Hornet." What could be better for a young boy?